

Rocky Mountain Front Foothills (2,018,789 acres)

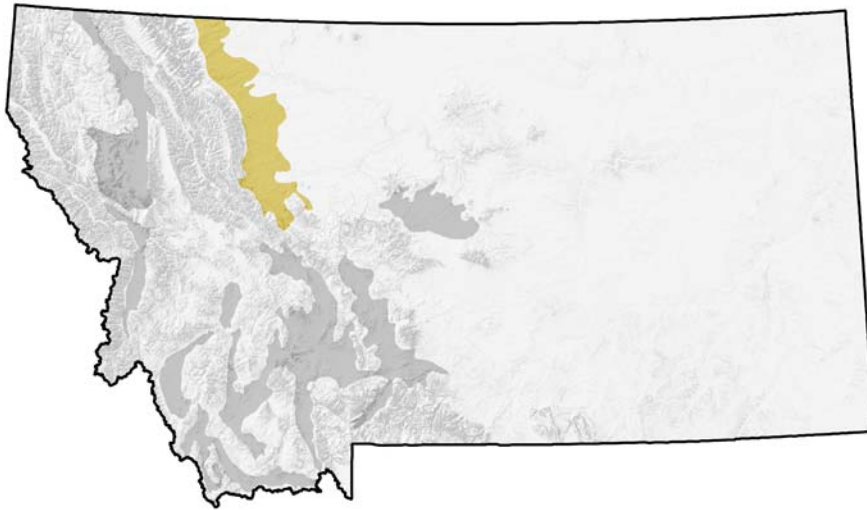


Figure 9. Rocky Mountain Front Foothills Focus Area

The Rocky Mountain Front, extending from Alberta, Canada, south through Montana, marks the easternmost edge of the Bob Marshall Wilderness, where thrust-faulted mountains give way to rolling foothills and Great Plains grasslands. This variable landscape still offers glimpses of grizzly bears moving from high mountain fir and spruce forests to native prairie grasslands dotted with pothole marshes where migrating birds stage season after season. With the exception of bison, all of the native mammals that inhabited this land when Lewis and Clark passed through survive here.

Landscape Characteristics

This subsection consists of mountain front foothills, moraines, fans, and terraces that formed in calcareous shales overlain by till, outwash, alluvium, and terrace deposits. The landscape has been modified by glaciation. Elevations range from 3,400 to 8,500 feet. Drainage density is low to moderate. Mean annual precipitation ranges from 12 to 20 inches, with about half falling as snow. The soil temperature and moisture regimes are frigid and typic ustic. Chinook winds are frequent. The primary natural disturbance is fire. Another important natural biotic disturbance is beaver activity in riparian areas. Land use is predominantly livestock grazing. The breakdown for land stewardship in the Rocky Mountain Front Foothills area is as follows:

U.S. Federal Agencies:	33,421 acres, or 1.7% of total area, which include:
BLM:	9,019 acres, or 0.5% of total area
USFS:	4,819 acres, or 0.2% of total area
USFWS:	1,421 acres, or less than 0.1% of total area
State Agencies:	172,603 acres, or 8.5% of total area
Tribal Lands:	482,906 acres, or 23.9% of total area

Private: 1,329,427 acres, or 65.9% of total area

Associated Habitats

Habitat	Habitat Tier	Percent of Area
Limber Pine	III	2.02
Mixed Broadleaf Forest	I	2.13
Altered Herbaceous	II	3.77
Agricultural Lands - Dry	III	4.41
Agricultural Lands - Irrigated	III	5.96
Mixed Mesic Shrubs	II	6.13
Wetland and Riparian	I	6.47
Moderate/High Cover Grasslands	I	10.46
Low/Moderate Cover Grasslands	I	49.69

Note: A total of 91.03% of the Rocky Mountain Front Foothills area is represented; 8.97% is made up of a combination of other habitat types.

Associated Species of Greatest Conservation Need (Tier I Species)

There are a total of 362 terrestrial vertebrate species that are found within the Rocky Mountain Front Foothills Focus Area. Tier I species are listed below. All associations can be found in Table 15.

Amphibians: Western Toad and Northern Leopard Frog

Reptiles: Western Hog-nosed Snake

Birds: Common Loon, Trumpeter Swan, Harlequin Duck, Bald Eagle, Piping Plover, Mountain Plover, Long-billed Curlew, Black Tern, Flammulated Owl, and Burrowing Owl

Mammals: Townsend's Big-eared Bat, Black-tailed Prairie Dog, Northern Bog Lemming, Grizzly Bear, Canada Lynx, and American Bison

Conservation Concerns & Strategies

Conservation Concerns	Conservation Strategies
Habitat fragmentation as a result of conversion of natural lands to agriculture and human population growth/development and energy exploration and development activities	Policy-based approaches that encourage the conservation of natural communities rather than support their conversion

	Increased efforts to maintain ecological features (e.g., black-tailed prairie dog colonies) or processes (e.g., fire) on public lands as they disappear from private lands
	Promote further development of county ordinances that help guide future residential and commercial development
	Identify and prioritize key wildlife linkage areas, and work with other state and federal agencies, conservation groups, and landowners to restore wildlife connectivity
Invasive or exotic plant species	Support cooperative efforts to eradicate or reduce the abundance of exotic or invasive plant species

References

The Nature Conservancy. 2005. Unpublished report.

The Nature Conservancy. 1999. Ecoregional Conservation in the Northern Great Plains Steppe. Northern Great Plains Steppe Ecoregional Planning Team. 76 pp.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2004. Conservation Focus Areas of the Great Divide: a vast region encompassing the Upper Missouri, Yellowstone and upper Columbia watersheds. Publisher: USFWS, Benton Lake Wildlife Refuge, Great Falls, MT. 77 pp.